

**WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**VALUE FOR MONEY AND CUSTOMER SERVICE**  
**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 30 OCTOBER 2017**

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**Title:**

**STRATEGIC REVIEW OF WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL – UPDATE  
REPORT**

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Julia Potts

Wards Affected: all

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**1. Background**

1.1 A strategic review of the Council was undertaken in November 2016. The consultants were asked specifically to:

- Identify and articulate the strategic opportunities, which the Council may wish to pursue.
- Analyse the challenges and issues for Waverley Borough Council in achieving these opportunities including organisational, partnership, resources, skills and culture.
- Produce a statement setting out the Council’s strategic ambition and key priorities for discussion by the Executive and Directors.

1.2 The review involved meetings with the Leader and Executive, Leader of the Opposition, backbench Members including those involved with Scrutiny, the Executive Director, Directors, Heads of Service and a group of staff randomly selected but covering a range of services and grade. Key council documents and performance information were also reviewed including an expert opinion and analysis of the Council’s financial position. A telephone conversation was also held with the Chief Executive of Surrey County Council to obtain a partner perspective.

1.3 The Strategic Review was aimed at being a “catalyst for the council to develop a more ambitious agenda for its place and to explore the role of the council in keeping Waverley successful and prosperous.”

**2. Summary of Consultant’s Findings**

2.1 The consultant’s report is set out at **Annexe 1** but a summary of their findings are set out below.

2.2 The consultants’ findings were divided into two main areas; Strategic Vision and How the Council Works. Each section of their findings was followed by a number of recommendations entitled ‘Way Forward’.

## **Strategic Vision**

### **Findings**

- i. There are insufficient linkages between the Corporate Plan, Economic Strategy and Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- ii. The existing Corporate Plan is too narrowly defined and lacks specific targets and actions. There is a need to set out the Council's ambitions in terms of its place shaping role.
- iii. The Economic Strategy is non-specific and sets no framework for how the Council will support existing businesses, promote future economic activity or support the viability of its town centres and high streets. The Council has pursued various projects which have not necessarily been set within any strategic context.
- iv. The Council has good financial standing and has been prudently managed. However the 'expert analysis' of the medium Term Financial Strategy also highlighted the need for a more expansive efficiency programme focusing on generating income and making provision for investment including the scope and role for borrowing.
- v. Many Members and staff acknowledged the need for a more strategic vision and high expectations that the new Council leadership will set a new and ambitious agenda.

### **Way Forward**

- i. The Executive needs to articulate a strategic vision and priorities for the Council which, whilst including the existing priorities of customer service, community wellbeing, environment and value for money, also incorporates the development of the Council's place-shaping role. The Council needs to balance its duty to provide good stewardship and to value and secure its natural assets with the need to promote the economy, recognising that there may be opposition to its proposals from the public.
- ii. Develop a new Economic Development Plan and master plans for some or all of Waverley's town centres. Such a Plan could set out how best to ensure the vibrancy of town centres, the role they may play in the visitor economy and how best to support small businesses and traders.
- iii. The new Medium Term Financial Strategy needs to move away from an annualised budget process, needs to incorporate a crosscutting efficiency programme and modernisation of council business processes and needs a focus on growing the income base.
- iv. Waverley needs to broaden its approach to partnership working and establish a wide range of alliances.
- v. Consider its future viability as an organisation and consider how to partner with others so that it takes control of its own destiny as far as it can.

## **How the Council Works**

### **Findings**

- i. Members and officers share a pride in and loyalty towards Waverley and a determination to provide good services to residents.
- ii. There is both talent and capability amongst Members, senior managers and within the wider workforce.
- iii. Attitudes and working relationships between members and officers are not always as they should be.
- iv. Managerial Leadership is not sufficiently visible to the workforce.
- v. Services tend to work in their individual silos and the Council does not have a strong corporate ethos.
- vi. Recruitment is located in finance, Strategic HR reports to the Executive Director and staff development sits with the Head of Policy and Governance. As a consequence no one takes ownership of the need for an alternative approach to recruitment and retention.
- vii. Formal decision-making processes to Member level bodies seem to be slow, cumbersome and require an unnecessary number of reports for further decisions on minor matters of implementation.
- viii. Decision-making within the officer structure is protracted and it appears that levels of delegation are not sufficient.
- ix. Insufficient delegation and a focus on operational matters prevents Corporate Management Team from having capacity for strategic matters and the pace of change and scope for innovation are stifled.
- x. The Council's working environment seems old fashioned and not all of the Council's business processes are modernised
- xi. Several Members cited Planning Services and HR as the services they were most concerned about.
- xii. There is a lack of appropriate support for Members to undertake their role including the absence of any dedicated administrative support and a lack of separate and private meeting spaces for the majority group and opposition group.

### **Way Forward**

- i. Improve working relationships and attitudes between Members and officers and establish clarity on the political direction the Council wishes to set. For example through:
  - Executive and Directors working together to articulate the new strategic vision and priorities using away days, workshops etc
  - Ongoing use of Executive Briefing as a forum to co-develop policy, monitor progress and ease the path of decision-making reports.
  - Visible leadership of the Leader and Executive Director to the workforce and other stakeholders
  - Improved support to Overview and Scrutiny (implementing the proposals already agreed);
  - Improved arrangements for responses to ward members' casework including administrative support to progress and chase

- Critical Incident Reporting Protocol put in place to ensure all staff are aware of issues which require the Leader or Portfolio Holder to be notified to support a 'no surprises' ethos
  - Identifying the need for mentoring or coaching for officers and members
- ii. Scheme of delegation to be reviewed to improve speed of decision-making, particularly on implementation matters where the substantive matter has already been approved and has the necessary budget provision.
  - iii. Review the delegation arrangements to senior managers to free up time for strategic matters and speed up the pace of operational decisions by placing them at the right level.
  - iv. All external partnership forums should be identified and appropriate attendance agreed.
  - v. Greater explicit use of cross cutting themes and working, building on what is already in place via the Foresight Groups.
  - vi. Approaches to customer care and service should be reviewed to improve attitudes towards residents, responsiveness to complaints, access arrangements by phone and in person and use of the web-site for service delivery.
  - vii. Identify and establish a robust efficiency savings programme to support the new Medium Term Financial Strategy and to streamline business systems and ways of working. The scope to work in partnership with other neighbouring councils or provide a modern working environment should be explored. This may be particularly applicable for services which are under pressure, where the Council finds difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff or where others are known to provide best practice services.
  - viii. Improve facilities and support for elected members.
  - ix. Pursue all opportunities to learn best practice and service developments from others.
  - x. Ensure the Council is fit for purpose in terms of structure, change management, project management, negotiation and partnership skills.
  - xi. Give consideration to bringing the different aspects of the HR Service together and putting in place an improvement plan.
  - xii. Give consideration to drawing up an improvement plan for Planning so that the need for support to the service and explicit attention to the key concerns can be progressed.

### **3 Four key priorities for improvement**

3.1 The Leader and Executive Director identified four main areas as being of the highest priority for change and improvement. These related to:

- **Strategic focus from Directors;**
- **The Council's Strategic ambitions;**
- **Supporting and improving the Council's Planning Service; and**
- **Supporting and improving the Council's HR functions.**

## **4 Action Plan**

- 4.1 Following the consultant's report an action plan was put together to address the findings. The current version of the plan is set out at Annexe 2.
- 4.2 A three phase approach was adopted. Some actions were put in place with immediate effect (such as the change of name from Corporate Management Team to Management Board and changing agendas to focus on strategic items). Actions requiring more time were scheduled for the end of April 2017 and other actions requiring a more fundamental review of structures and budgets were to commence in May. In addition it was proposed that early attention be given to the proposed budget for 2018/19. The timescales applied to the Plan were extremely ambitious and have not all been met.

## **5 Progress to date**

- 5.1 Members will see that a number of the actions have been completed and these actions are highlighted in pale green on the attached Action Plan.
- 5.2 Some of the biggest advances have been made in the area of decision making with measures to speed up processes. A new scheme of delegation was agreed in April involving new financial thresholds and changes made to the Constitution mean that staffing decisions within budget are now delegated to Heads of Service/Directors. The new Scrutiny process is also now in place as is a new system of tracking Member queries to ensure timely responses are given.
- 5.3 Two areas highlighted by the consultants relate to the service areas of Planning and Strategic HR. A consultant was engaged to work with the Planning service and a Development Control Performance and Improvement Plan is due shortly. An HR Improvement Plan is still under consideration.
- 5.4 Since the review, more opportunities have been explored to work collaboratively with other authorities and learn from best practice. The Housing Benefits Team are working with Rushmoor Council to improve performance using a Systems Thinking approach to service delivery. Rushmoor have the best performance in this service area in the country. In addition meetings with other stakeholder groups such as the Chambers of Commerce have been more constructive.
- 5.5 Work on a revised Economic Development Strategy initially moved quickly but has since been slightly delayed by progress on the Local Plan and the need for synergy between the two documents.
- 5.6 Some of the actions relating to the strategic direction of the Council have taken longer than originally forecast due to changes in senior roles and this has had a knock-on effect on other actions. Two successful workshops have taken place in August and September, facilitated by the LGA, with the Executive and Strategic Directors and the outcomes will be shared at further workshops with Overview & Scrutiny in the coming weeks.

## **6 Conclusion**

Considerable progress has been made in a number of areas recommended by the outcome of the Strategic Review but a number of actions remain outstanding. This inevitably has a knock-on effect on other areas of the Strategic Review Action Plan. However, with the appointment of an interim Managing Director the management team are working closely with the Executive to establish a vision and strategic direction for the Council.

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Value for Money and Customer Service Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews the progress made to date against the Strategic Review Action Plan and makes any comments or recommendations to the Executive.

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### **Background Papers**

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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